
Costa Rica strikes against false hope

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Many people in the stem cell community and at CIRM have been concerned about the growing trend of stem cell tourism -- people going overseas to receive unproven "stem cell" therapies. The term Stem Cells is in quotes here because in general these clinics are less than open about what, exactly, the therapy entails. One tourism destination in Costa Rica owned by an Arizona entrepreneur was just shut down by the country's Health Ministry. According to a story in Reuters the treatments cost between \$5,000 and \$30,000.

We'd love nothing more than to see people truly healed by stem cell therapies, but the only way to get there is through good research and clinical trials that prove a therapy's safety and effectiveness. Clinics such as the one in Costa Rica profit off of people's hopes without offering a verifiably effective therapy.

The International Society for Stem Cell Research provides some helpful information on stem cell therapies, and how to avoid clinics that misrepresent what their therapies can do. You can download it here: <http://www.isscr.org/home/publications/patient-handbook/>

We also have a video with CIRM grantee and Scripps faculty member Jeanne Loring discussing her concerns about the practice of stem cell tourism.

If you want to learn more about stem cell tourism you can attend the public seminar in San Francisco on June 15, in which a panel of stem cell scientists will discuss with the audience the safe path to the clinic. Information about that panel is available here. A video of that discussion will also be posted on the CIRM web site.

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